

50th Anniversary of National Public Works Week

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May 16-22, 2010, marks the 50th anniversary of National Public Works Week (NPWW), and in recognition of this year's golden anniversary, many public agencies and chapters across the U.S. and Canada are planning celebrations and events. Fifty years ago, NPWW had its start at the APWA mid-winter meeting in January 1960, when a new APWA Public Relations Committee was formed under the Chairmanship of Rear Admiral Cushing Phillips, U.S.N. (Retired), who was then President of the Board of Public Works of Los Angeles, California. At that time, Admiral Phillips' mission for the committee was to launch an important "public education program," designed primarily to "foster a better understanding of the function and importance of public works in modern community life, and to enhance public works prestige as professional engineers and administrators." The first observance of NPWW was held the week of October 2-8, 1960.

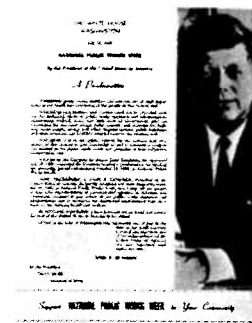
In cooperation with Kiwanis International, activities and events were planned for towns and cities across the U.S. and Canada in observance of the week. A NPWW kit was sent to mayors, local Kiwanis Clubs, and to public works professionals, complete with radio and TV press releases, sample editorial articles, window posters, speech material, and a list of suggested activities such as parades, open houses, equipment displays, and special luncheons featuring public works speakers. (Much of the current NPWW outreach materials are available online in the How To Guide, which can be accessed at <http://www.apwa.net/About/NPWW/2010/>)

In 1960 a new, documentary motion picture, "Headline for Harper," was produced as a public service in connection with the week highlighting 50 years of public works progress and illustrating its importance to America's growing population. The film was sponsored by International Harvester Company in cooperation with APWA, and created by Parthenon Pictures in Hollywood. It was dedicated to the "men of Public Works who make daily living safer, healthier and more comfortable for the American public." Admiral Phillips felt that one of the main objectives of the public education program in 1960 was to tell the positive story of the contributions public works professionals make in every community, and for this reason the ensuing publicity about outstanding public works officials would be of tremendous value to the profession. Phillips also highlighted the highest standards of professional conduct for public works officials with the observance of the selection of the "Top Ten Public Works Men-of-the-Year." (Later this was changed to "Top Ten Public Works Leaders of the Year.")

Another key goal of the week was to elevate the status of public works engineers and administrators in the eyes of their respective communities, and instill greater civic pride in local government. APWA newsletters in the early years highlighted the states that issued proclamations and any federal observances of congressional resolutions endorsing NPWW, such as the 1962 approval of a Senate Resolution establishing National Public Works Week. Similar to today's chapter and member outreach, APWA contacted mayors and requested proclamations, or sought their participation or support of the week in other ways.

Over the years, U.S. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson and George H. W. Bush sent letters of acknowledgment. Senator Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois has been credited with paving the way for the National Public Works Week recognition letters from U.S. Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, as well as a Proclamation signed by President John F. Kennedy in 1962. Most recently, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has sent letters recognizing the role that National Public Works Week plays in celebrating the professional contributions of Canadian public works employees, and the essential part they play in their communities.

In the early 1960s, the celebration happily coincided with National Newspaper Week, and APWA promoted the similarities that existed between the roles and responsibilities of both public works officials and newspapers, because "both fields of endeavor share the ideal of service to the community, and both are judged on the degree of public acceptance or approval their efforts engender." For many years following the initial efforts and creation of the week, most information was disseminated through the *APWA Reporter*, with one NPWW poster inserted as a centerfold into one issue of the magazine. "By the 1980s, the Top Ten awards program took more of the spotlight.



The National Public Works Week presidential proclamation included in the September 1962 issue of the *APWA Reporter*

It was around 1990 that APWA began commissioning special NPWW posters and developing other resources to encourage and assist agency members in planning events for the entire week," said Connie Hartline, APWA Publications Manager.

Fast forward to the 21st century and National Public Works Week continues to instruct and inspire the North American public about the essential benefits that public works brings to their everyday life. Now scheduled for the third week in May, National Public Works Week is recognized and celebrated by municipalities, counties, regions, states and provinces, and with proclamations issued by governors of many states in the United States and premiers of many provinces in Canada.

In Canada, the Canadian Public Works Association (CPWA) encourages city and town involvement to celebrate the week by holding a CPWA National Public Works Week awards program. This program recognizes five categories of municipalities and regions from "small" to "metro-sized" communities who have held exceptional NPWW programs. The entries are judged on criteria that emphasize outreach and education. Many agencies host local community events that include school and public tours of facilities and projects, equipment displays, hands-on demonstrations, elementary and middle school visits by public works staff, high school public works career events, and public relations outreach. Brampton, Ontario focused on education during their award-winning 2009 events: elementary children participated in a poster contest; middle school children participated in a bridge building engineering project; and senior high school students attended a public works career forum. These events are designed not only to educate the public to the long-lasting effect that public works has on their communities, but also to inspire young people to consider a career in public works.

In the last decade, NPWW has grown in involvement, outreach and creativ-

ity. In addition to soliciting proclamations from governors and premiers, APWA chapters assist by spreading the word to thousands of agencies. At the national level, communications about public works extends to legislators and their staff serving in the U.S. Congress and on Canada's Parliament Hill. In Washington, D.C., NPWW is commemorated by an APWA-hosted reception on Capitol Hill, attended by members of Congress, congressional staff and representatives of the many groups APWA works with in the infrastructure community.

Contemporary themes for National Public Works Week have kept pace with the evolution of infrastructure and with the environment in which that progress is made. In 2009 National Public Works Week was aptly themed "Revitalize, Reinvest, and Renew" in keeping with the economic stimulus and infrastructure spending that was instituted. This year's theme of "Public Works: Above, Below, and All Around

You" is interpreted visually in a distinctive graphic line illustration that captures the essence and all-pervasive effort of public works professionals and their projects to enhance the quality of modern life in all of our communities.



The 2010 National Public Works Week poster

To learn more about National Public Works Week and how you, your chapter, community agency or company can become involved, visit www.apwa.net or contact Jon Dilley at jdilley@apwa.net.

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